

# Wisconsin Sharptail Status 2001

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## **Abstract**

The total number of dancing males on the 9 managed tracts in Wisconsin decreased from 284 in 2000 to 159 this year, indicating that our sharptail breeding population is continuing the gradual decline began in 1999. Counts on individual properties revealed that declines were not pervasive, however, with numbers of birds decreasing on some properties while remaining stable on others. Survey efforts by the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society in unmanaged habitats resulted in locating less sharptails in 2001, with a total of 115 birds found this spring compared to 282 last year. However, surveys of other non-managed areas were less extensive than in 2000.

## **Methods**

Sharptail populations on managed properties were monitored by counting displaying males on dancing grounds. Male birds were identified by observations from blinds placed on dancing grounds or with the aid of field glasses after approaching the dancing ground afoot or by vehicle. Complete census of display grounds was attempted on those properties designated as sharptail management tracts (Figure 1).

Sharptail surveys on private lands generally involved selecting one or more blocks of the best available habitat and then conducting listening routes along roads transecting those blocks. Those dancing grounds found within wildland habitat blocks were approached and all birds flushed from each site were counted, no attempt being made to distinguish sexes. The survey is a cooperative effort between DNR, USFS, GLIFWC, members of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, and volunteers. Sharptail surveys on unmanaged lands were concentrated within a portion of northwestern Wisconsin where large expanses of timberland had been recently cut-over in response to an outbreak of jack pine budworm. These cut-over patches are located in Douglas and Bayfield Counties, primarily in deer management units 2 and 9 (Figure 1).

## **Results**

The 2001 dancing ground survey indicated decreases in sharptail numbers on most managed sites, contributing to an overall decline of 44% in comparison to 2000 counts (Table 1).

Dancing male counts on all of the managed lands except Pershing Wildlife Area declined substantially this year.

Dancing male counts fell below the long-term averages in most locations, and the small number of birds on some sites should cause concern about the security of the sharptail flocks in those locations.

Sharptail surveys revealed that good numbers of birds continue to exist within some of the northwestern Wisconsin sites that were clearcut during jack pine budworm salvage operations. Survey efforts by members of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society resulted in a count of 115 birds in deer management units 2 and 9. This count was 59% lower than that obtained

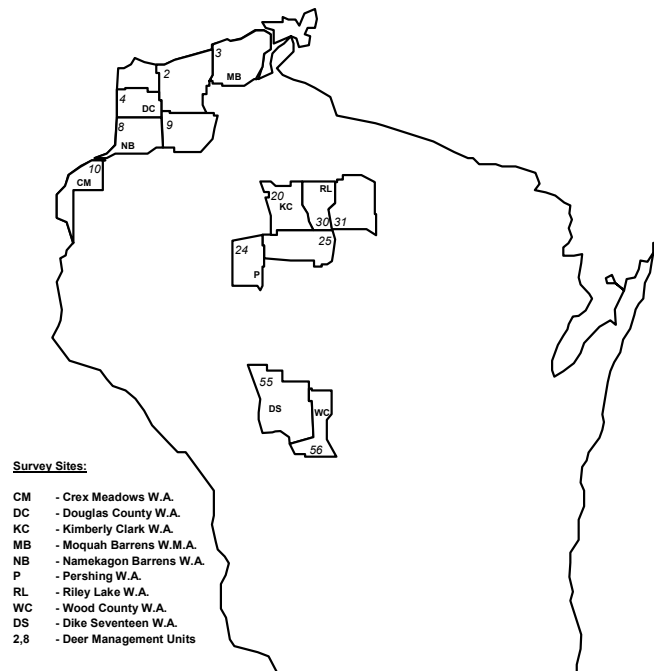
during a similar survey operation conducted in 2000. Because the budworm infestation peaked in 1993, most harvested stands have now regenerated or been replanted and will inexorably outgrow their usefulness to sharptails.

**Table 1. Sharptail Population Trends on Managed Lands.**

Property	Number of Dancing Males										
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Crex Meadows W.A.	126	47	53	59	83	110	117	132	111	110*	73*
Douglas County W.A.	5	4	2	8	12	9	9	18	20	16	11
Kimberly Clark W.A.	56	32	20	20	28	20	15	25	40	39	5
Moquah Barrens W.M.A.	6	9	6	7	21	14	17	34	40	36	19
Namekagon Barrens W.A.	37	25	16	25	44	48	55	74	54	44	15
Pershing W.A.	37	34	24	16	26	30	43	34	22	**	19
Riley Lake W.M.A.	25	8	5	7	18	17	19	19	27	27	17
Wood County W.A.	54	13	11	16	19	18	10	17	18	6	0
Dike Seventeen	16	10	9	9	8	7	3	18	3	6	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>159</b>

\*Not a complete count of dancing males.

\*\*A few dancing males were present.



**Figure 1. Sharptail survey area, 2000.**